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ABSTRACT

Two essays are presented, "The Changing Shape of Work: Psychosocial Trends in America," by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, and "Lives in Transition," by Ellen Goodman. In the first, several trends outlined include increasing participation of women and youths in the labor force, an increase in non-nuclear families, better jobs available to blacks combined with continuing higher unemployment for blacks versus whites, extension of collective bargaining but an overall decline in union power, and general "rights consciousness". Possible consequences of these trends are examined: inaccurate manpower forecasting, growth of psychosocial as opposed to economic incentives in work, growing rights conflicts, incentives for taking less desirable jobs, and competition for desirable jobs. In the second essay, social change in the 1970's is discussed, with attention given to changing roles for men and women, personal and work relationships, and opening of opportunity combined with a lack of fixed roles or expectations. It is proposed that the role for colleges in this transitional period is to help students learn flexibility, decision-making, how to cope with change, and finally, how to cause change when necessary. (MSE)

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## THE CHANGING SHAPE OF WORK: PSYCHOSOCIAL TRENDS IN AMERICA

**Rosabeth Moss Kanter**

## LIVES IN TRANSITION: THE NEW MIDDLE GROUND

**Ellen Goodman**

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1978 National Conference Series, American Association for Higher Education

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**THE CHANGING SHAPE OF WORK: PSYCHOSOCIAL TRENDS IN AMERICA**

**Rosabeth Moss Kanter** (p.1)

**LIVES IN TRANSITION: THE NEW MIDDLE GROUND**

**Ellen Goodman** (p.9)

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# THE CHANGING SHAPE OF WORK: PSYCHOSOCIAL TRENDS IN AMERICA

**Rosabeth Moss Kanter**

Did the 1960's really happen? Was that decade (which in cultural time may have lasted until 1972) a dream or a nightmare? The answer depends on one's evaluation of the vision of more youth-centered, nonmaterialistic, socially rather than vocationally conscious values expressed then. Is the women's movement over, and is affirmative action an acknowledged failure? Have youthful protesters seen the light and accepted the wisdom of traditional educational systems and mainstream career paths? Have we now returned to 1950's "normalcy"—or are there fundamental shifts in the ways Americans view working and living?

I think there *are* major changes, particularly as they bear on the demands, expectations, and concerns people increasingly bring to the world of work; that world which, for more and more Americans of both sexes, defines the meaning of adulthood.

If the cultural ethos of the 1960's could be phrased in terms of *quality,* that of today's students would be described by some analysts in terms of *quantity:* a concern for accumulation; for entry to high-paying occupations; for knowing how many jobs exist in the first place and for making oneself marketable with respect to them. But what is so confusing about our times is that, in fact, both quality and quantity are expected. From youth, from women, from minorities, from older people, and from majority men, we hear simultaneously the desire for *enough,* for *more,* and for *better.* And the academy is often on the receiving end of such new desires, both from its clientele —the students—and from its own employees—faculty, administrators, and other workers.

This presentation lays out some major psychosocial trends in America and discusses their possible consequences, consequences of concern to all educational leaders and policy formulators.

## SOME MAJOR SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRENDS IN AMERICA

One of the biggest social changes since World War II, both proportionally and in magnitude, involves the vast increase in the participation of women in the paid labor force. The large increase in the number of women in the labor force has offset the slight decline in the participation of men, so that overall, since 1950, the proportion of the population 16 years of age and over in the labor force has increased by a percentage point or two.[1] The biggest increase has been in the participation rate of white married women, which has nearly doubled since 1950. This has also resulted in an increase in the number of two-worker families, a phenomenon growing faster among whites than among blacks, who traditionally have had the larger proportion of two-worker families. Furthermore, two-worker families are increasingly found at all levels of the economic ladder, and there has been a big increase in two-worker married couples in which the husband is a professional rather than a blue-collar worker. And although the number of children in the population has been declining, the number of children with working mothers has been increasing rapidly.

There has been a significant increase in the number of non-nuclear families, especially in households in which husbands are no longer the sole or primary breadwinners. The first trend is connected with the second: nuclear family households with a husband breadwinner and a wife not in the paid labor force now constitute under 20 percent of all families in America. Continuing divorce rates and the existence of single-parent households, coupled with women's increased labor force participation, has dramatically changed the shape of American family life, and along with it the images of men and women. For example, while most single-parent households are headed by women, there has been a continuing increase in the number of men who have households alone, and who thus have primary responsibility for the care of children, even if they pay for hired household help.

The labor force has been getting younger, not only as a result of the youth bulge of the last decade or so, but also because of two other trends: the decline in the labor force participation rate of older people, and a large increase in teenage labor force participation, which has grown two-and-a-half times faster than the teenage population as a whole since 1974. While it is possible that this trend could be offset by the decline of mandatory retirement and the aging of the popula-

tion as a whole, this is unlikely because there is also a trend toward early retirement. The expressed preference of a large segment of the older population is to retire even if mandatory retirement were eliminated. But regardless of the age trend, the labor force as a whole is growing more educated. The median educational attainment of employed Americans has shown a small increase over the past ten years, with significant increases in the educational levels of black jobholders and of blue-collar workers. The proportion of blue-collar workers with a year or more of college has doubled since 1966, so that nearly a fifth of all-class workers and a tenth of other blue-collar workers had at least four years of college.

The work situation for blacks has been moving in two contradictory directions. On the one hand, blacks employed in the labor force have taken a slightly increased share of the good jobs in the last 15 to 20 years. (Although it should be noted that black women have lost some share of the good jobs to the white women newly entering the labor force.) Though the proportion remains low, black jobholders have doubled their share of total professional employment. On the other hand, more blacks than whites continue to be unemployed, and structural unemployment in poor black communities has continued despite upturns in the economy. The unemployment rate among black teenagers is as high as 50 percent. Thus, signs of progress tend to be confined to those who are fortunate enough to enter the work force in the first place. While jobs are opening to educated blacks, uneducated and unemployed blacks remain a major social problem.

Since 1960, union membership as a proportion of the nonagricultural labor force has declined, but at the same time, collective bargaining has extended into new sectors. Traditional unionism, centered around the industrial trade unions, may be declining, to be replaced by a new breed of union member in the white-collar and public sectors. A new kind of focus for unions—on quality of work life and on participation in management decisions—may be beginning to supplement the old emphasis on the bread-and-butter issues of income and job security.

The growing edge of unionism is in public-service employment—in government, in hospitals, and in schools. But union membership in the public sector is clearly running into increasing resistance from taxpayers and from public-service employers. Peter Drucker has argued that with the steady decline in relative union strength, together with the steady erosion of leadership, has come a decline in political power. He points to labor's startling impotence with Congress and with an administration that owes its election to organized labor and a fall in public esteem.

"Rights consciousness" has, at the same time, been growing. It has taken several forms:

(1) The sense of being entitled to a job. The fight of older people against mandatory retirement signals not just an interest in work, but in their sense that they are entitled to work if they want to. Workers are approaching jobs as though they have an ownership right to the job. Seniority is only one of the issues. Law suits are being brought by people who feel they are the victims of age, sex, or race discrimination, or reverse discrimination. On surveys, a large measure of young people have indicated that they believe they are entitled to a job "as a social right."

(2) Rights consciousness also takes the form of a sense that one is entitled to a voice at work, to greater control over or to participation in decisions affecting one's job and work life. Some white collar unions are asking for participation in management (although traditional unions in America seem to stay away from management areas and do not push for inclusion in the same way that unions in Europe do). A general anti-authority attitude has begun to enter the workplace, following student revolts against authority about a decade ago.

(3) Rights consciousness is reinforced by the increasing benefits that are to be gained from jobs. Since World War II, fringe benefits have gradually been extended in most workplaces—in kind, in quality, and in the number of workers covered. Employee health benefits have increasingly included dental as well as medical benefits; maternity-leave options with pay and/or reemployment provisions have been developed; Workmen's Compensation insurance coverage has been extended; and work options such as job sharing, flexible work hours, or staggered hours have been highly publicized. At the same time that fringe benefits have been growing, so have expectations. On national surveys, the percentage of the labor force expressing a desire for more fringe benefits has remained about the same, despite an increase in overall benefits. Thus, for those who are employed, rights consciousness involves an attitude that jobs should offer more and more of the basic necessities of life besides direct income. The rights consciousness issue can also be framed as the question, "Am I getting my fair share?"

(4) Finally, rights consciousness has been supported by recent court decisions that have extended the ideal of entitlement at work. Since 1970, the idea of constitutional employee rights has begun to materialize in the courts. Cases have included the issues of freedom of speech at work, the right to privacy from employers, and "conscientious objection" to employer demands.[2]

Yankelovich has argued that his surveys indicate a "new breed" of Americans has come to feel that success is not enough to satisfy their self-fulfillment yearnings. They are reaching out for something more and for something different. He estimates that at the present time, the new breed —those who have come to feel that their self-fulfillment aspirations can no longer be wholly satisfied through success—constitute a majority of the American people (approximately 52 percent). Not surprisingly, the younger, better educated, and more affluent parts of the population are disproportionately represented in the new breed, while the older, poorer, less well-educated segments of the population cling somewhat more tenaciously to the old value system and to traditional success symbols.[3]

Most of the self-fulfillment seekers do not abhor or reject success outright; they value it, but at the same time they find it wanting. According to Yankelovich: "The conventional symbols no longer satisfy their deepest psychological needs, nor nourish their self-esteem nor fulfill their cravings for the full, rich life. Their choice leads not toward *less* but toward *more*. They demand full enjoyment as well as full employment."[4] But the nature of the "something more" these people are seeking is still not clear: smaller, more personalized workplaces? Treatment as an individual, not just as a replaceable job occupant? More disposable income and adequate time for leisure self-indulgence (the kind of weekend hedonism to compensate for workaday drudgery that Daniel Bell predicted for the "post industrial society")?[5]

Two new value clusters underlying these social trends can be identified: a concern for jobs as a source of meaning in life (including the expectation that jobs provide psychological fulfillment as well as improved quality of life outside the job); and a concern for individual rights at work.[6] Both of these value clusters indicate that attention to the *quality* of jobs may be as socially significant as attention to the *quantity* of jobs. These new desires are not, however, automatically expressed by every segment of the labor force; many of the social trends are highly differentiated by population segment. In fact, the strongest pressures for increased pay, material benefits, and job security, as well as the strongest tendencies to disengage from work and find major life satisfactions elsewhere, come from those whose desire for involvement and advancement at work are blocked.[7]

**TABLE 1**

| **Those who answer that they "want a job" on the BLS survey:** | **Millions** |
|---|---|
| Official unemployment | 7.0 |
| Those who have a part-time job but want a full-time job | 3.5 |
| Those who want a job, but for various reasons (health, school, responsibilities at home) are not looking for one | 4.1 |
| Those who want a job but are no longer looking because they are discouraged | .9 |
| **Those who say that they "do not want a job" on the BLS survey** | |
| Those (predominantly women) who have home responsibilities | 4.2 |
| The elderly (55-64 years of age) | 1.7 |
| Students | 2.2 |
| Employable recipients of welfare and food stamps | 2.0 |
| Enrollees (largely inner-city inhabitants) in federal training programs | 1.0 |
| Men of 25-54 years of age | .7 |
| | 27.3 million |

(The groups from the second category were included because of the belief that if the right kinds of jobs are incentives to work were available, those people would want to work.)

**Possible Consequences of These Trends**

(1) *A demand for many more jobs than currently estimated?* One set of calculations, independently derived by both Eli Ginsburg and the Public Agenda Foundation, using two different methods, estimates that there will be a demand for about 25 million new jobs, rather than the 7 million currently predicted on the basis of official unemployment figures.[8] The Yankelovich estimate is based on figures taken from the Bureau of Labor Statistics monthly survey (Table 1).

The pool of potential labor force participants has grown beyond all estimates. For example, in its forecasts the Bureau of Labor Statistics consistently has underestimated the number of women entering or reentering the labor force, and every year it has had to increase its projections. At the same time, although the economy is creating new jobs, the hard-core unemployed have not gotten them; women or others not predicted to be in the labor force or to be seeking work have taken a large share of these new jobs. Solutions for remedying economic disadvantage and for solving the unemployment problems have not been benefiting the hard-core poor. Structural unemployment has proved, and may continue to prove a recalcitrant problem; not only because most solutions to the unemployment problem—such as creating new jobs—are not effective for working with the hard-core unemployed, but also because of underestimates of the number of "unemployed"—that is, those who would take jobs if jobs became available.

(2) *Transfer payments removing incentives to take "undesirable" jobs?* Transfer payments take economic incentives away from people to whom only certain kinds of jobs are open. If a reasonable amount of income is otherwise available, the incentives for taking on "undesirable" jobs remain low. This is the explanation many economists give for the fact that the United States has a higher unemployment rate than Japan and parts of Europe. Transfer payments have many implications for economic welfare beyond the obvious ones. They have an impact on the ways in which jobs at the bottom of the prestige scale and with undesirable working conditions are evaluated: yet often these are the only jobs open to the structurally unemployed. They also have secondary impact—such as, in the U.S. welfare system, the removal of incentives for husbands to continue as breadwinners and to remain in the family.

Economists differ in their attributions of the causes and effects of unemployment, and, thus, in their remedies. The mainstream economic approach is to attribute a large share of adult unemployment (and a somewhat less, though still substantial amount of youth unemployment) to the low skills and weak labor force attachment of unemployed workers, which according to these economists are based in part on the existence of unemployment compensation. Other economists adopt a more psychosocial perspective, stressing the nature of the *jobs* open to large segments of the hard-core unemployed: unstable, futureless, and socially undesirable. According to this view, the jobs were *always* undesirable. Increasing the incentives to take them may necessitate not a decrease of transfer payments, but a change in the nature of such jobs and, more broadly, a change in secondary and discriminatory labor markets in general. What one makes of the consequences of transfer payments for unemployment is a political, not a technical question.

(3) *Organized labor no longer serving as the primary voice of labor?* Unions may begin to change their function, including the kinds of benefits they demand, and they may cease to be a central voice for those groups in the labor force who are pressing for new rights. Interest groups defined by age, race, sex, or ethnicity rather than by occupation or industry group may turn out to be the more significant pressure groups pushing the economy.

These groups are only indirectly represented by unions. For this reason there may be conflict between many people in the labor force and the traditional voice of organized labor, which some predict may find itself allied with big business and not particularly representative of the new demographic interest groups. The question of who speaks for workers may be a significant one in the future, and the level of political tension around work and employment policy may grow.

(4) *The growing importance of psychosocial rather than economic incentives?* Noneconomic incentives may increase in importance. A growing proportion of the labor force, including 63 percent of the women in a national survey, report that they work for self-fulfillment in addition to economic necessity. The question of the quality of worklife and its relationship to the quality of outside-of-work life has been raised with increasing frequency by the public as well as by policy innovators. The noneconomic benefits of jobs include not only the traditional range of fringe benefits such as health, dental, and even legal insurance (which has been proposed by some

unions), but also benefits that insure leisure time and the capacity to enjoy out of work life—benefits such as flexible scheduling. The notion that jobs should allow for self-expression and meaningful contribution as well as for the generation of income is especially significant. On the basis of trends in his surveys, Yankelovich argued that quality-of-life motivations are not well understood by employers, and that even when they are understood large organizations do not know how to balance them with their requirements for efficiency and productivity, which creates a flaw in the present incentive system. By "quality of life on the job" people mean that they do not wish to subordinate themselves to the work role: they want to receive recognition of their worth as people as well as for what they do on the job. Ideally, people would like to work in small groups where they can form close human ties with others. Many people would like to have a crack at more responsibility early in their careers, even though they may not be ready for it. Most people want a chance to learn new things and to find new ways to express themselves on the job, to find interest in their work, and to be with pleasant and agreeable people. They also want to make shorter commitments and more one-sided commitments—i.e., the employer is more obligated to them than they are to him.

A high level of frustration may develop among those who want meaningful jobs but do not find them. This is only one indication of the "underemployment" problem in America, which has more and more educated people competing for fewer and few prestigious and "socially significant" jobs. Their frustration may be expressed in a variety of ways: Two common reactions are psychological "dropping out" of work involvement (creating motivation and productivity problems) and increasing pressure on jobs that are not by nature "meaningful" and that do not allow for self-expression. The jobs and work problem in America, then, may not be only one of providing jobs, but also of providing jobs of a certain kind of quality, with particular psychological and social conditions.

(5) *Growing litigiousness and rights conflicts?* Conflicts over rights may increase. The quality controversy and the fairness problem may continue to plague us. Providing meaningful work might be much easier than providing rights at work, for rights often are in conflict.[9] For example, in the increasingly common situation where both antidiscrimination suits and reverse discrimination suits are simultaneously pressed, employers could be in the anomalous position of being required to pay both ways—to improve the situation of minorities and women over that of white males and then to pay while males for the reverse discrimination. What is fair in these situations? How can every group pressing for rights and improvement in their status in the labor force be accommodated? What are the tradeoffs between affirmative action and seniority? Who should pay the cost of remedying the situation of the disadvantaged? This is an issue that extends outside of the workplace to the economy in general, as job holders increasingly seem to resent paying for benefits for the unemployed, and there is greater pressure for people to pull their own weight.

(6) *Growing competition for "desirable" jobs?* There may be enormous competition for the shrinking number of jobs considered "desirable" i.e., (high-paying, high-prestige, meaningful). The social consequences of this competition cannot yet be predicted. Those who would normally have taken the elite jobs will, as the numbers of such jobs decline, take somewhat lesser jobs, and displace downward those at the next level. The implications of this bump phenomenon must be carefully considered. For example, there may be more pressure for credentials, along with more disenchantment with schools and universities for no longer guaranteeing immediate access to desirable work and for substituting the manufacture of credentials for educational substance. There may be effects on the worldwide economy that in turn affect the fate of workers here. With a drop in the numbers of young people entering the labor force, as predicted in demographic data, and with the increasing level of education in America which makes people not want to take the traditional blue-collar and clerical jobs, there could be severe labor shortages in these areas. There would be implications for the worldwide economy if America were forced to subcontract labor-intensive work to developing countries. This notion of work conflicts with the other increasingly accepted idea of lifetime employment rights.

(7) *Growing labor force splits?* A number of sharp labor force differentiations can be predicted if present trends continue and if the problems of meaningful work, underemployment, and unemployment are not solved. There will be a small group of people at the top, in prestigious managerial and professional occupations, who are highly work-involved, who have power (rights) and opportunity (for advancement, for self-expression), and who work long hours. There will be a

larger group who expect more from work, but who in the absence of getting more become "psychic work dropouts" and put increasing importance on the quality of their outside-of-work life. There will be another large group pressing for more work and more desirable work—those who are underemployed and those not yet in the labor force, as well as demographically based interest groups (older people, minorities, women). At the bottom, there will be a group of hard-core unemployed.

Whether the society and the economy can sustain these splits is a significant question. A related and equally significant question is, what perspective does each of these groups have on changing social values and psychological needs?

**THE OPPORTUNITY PROBLEM**

The fact that more people are seeking more opportunity and are more conscious of their rights is significant in and of itself. But it takes on additional significance in light of the importance of opportunity for work motivation and effective work behavior. Those who lack opportunity are often limited in their contributions to their organizations as well as frustrated by their unmet expectations.

In many organizations, the structure tends to divide jobs into roughly two kinds: those with a great deal of opportunity—with many ladder steps, high wages ceilings, frequent promotions and the expectation that people will be moving on to better jobs, and attention to training or the development of new skills; and those with low opportunity—short ladders, low ceilings, very few options for movement into other jobs, infrequent promotions, little expectation that people will move onto better jobs, and no attention to training or skill development. (It is important to note that what is critical here is not job content or pay, but rather where a given job stands in a chain of other jobs.) High- and low-opportunity positions tend to breed two very different styles of involvement in work, and thus two different "ideal types" of people: I call them "the moving" and "the stuck."[10]

Opportunity affects such key organizational-behavior variables as aspirations, self-esteem, work engagement, self-preparation, and style of expressing dissatisfaction. The moving tend to have or develop high aspirations and to aim for higher positions, in large part because they can already see themselves on a path leading to those positions; whereas the stuck tend to limit and lower their aspirations, and they appear to be less motivated to achieve because they lack a sense that better and higher positions are realistically attainable.

The moving tend to differ from the stuck in ways that set self-fulfilling prophecies in motion. That is, those in moving positions not only are in the formal position of being eligible for advancement, but they also tend to behave in ways that confirm their selection as those who should be moving along the corporate ladder—while those who are stuck tend, as a result of their situation, to act in ways that confirm the organization's lack of attention to them. These are cycles of advantage and cycles of disadvantage in which individual characteristics and structural position interact to keep the moving, moving and the stuck, stuck. The moving also have higher self-esteem and tend to see and use more skills, and their high opinion of themselves makes it easy for them to volunteer for assignments above their heads or to stretch to meet new challenges; they are certain they will succeed, as a result of being on the high-opportunity tracks. The stuck, in contrast, tend to think less well of themselves and tend to underrate and devalue their skills and abilities. This applies whether they are in job categories that have always been stuck, by design, or whether they got stuck after the experience of mobility and began to question whether they really possess the right kinds of skills for success. The stuck, therefore, are much less likely to perceive themselves as skilled, to make their skills or abilities known, or to feel that they can carry out assignments for which they do not already have the experience; the stuck are unlikely to give the organization any indication that they deserve to do more than is demanded by their current position. It is easy to see how attitudes and behavior that develop out of workers' job experiences can reinforce an organization's structural differentiation of people into those who are mobile and deserve advancement and those who are not.

The moving are also much more likely than the stuck to become highly work-engaged and even committed to the organization, although it is often to the *experience* of mobility and achievement that they become committed. The moving are much more likely to talk about work as a major source of life-investment and satisfaction, whereas the stuck, at every organizational level

and almost regardless of how they got stuck, are likely to either become "psychic dropouts," putting in their time but making their major life-investments elsewhere, or to actually dream of escape from the organization into some realm gives them a greater sense of growth possibilities.

The greater engagement of the moving also shows up in the extent to which they begin to prepare themselves in advance for their next job—what sociologists call "anticipatory socialization." The stuck are much more likely to invest themselves in perfecting details of the present job, in part because they do not see themselves as heading anywhere else. If anything, this increased competence in the present job does not help the stuck look better to the organization in advancement terms, but instead reinforces their stuckness, because if they are in a position where mobility is not expected, then mastery of the job merely makes them more indispensible in the current position. But the moving, knowing that they will be moving on, are much more likely to train themselves in advance in the skills, attitudes, and even physical appearance styles that they will need for the job they are about to move into. Organizations, by the way, pay a price for too much mobility and too much emphasis on advancement as the reward, because the moving are often engaging in self-training for advancement at the expense of increased competence in the present position. But again, it is possible to see the cycles of advantage and disadvantage in operation.

Finally, the moving are likely to be much more active about expressing dissatisfaction, much more constructive in their style of protesting or expressing grievance. They are likely to be much more optimistic about being listened to by decisionmakers and much more optimistic about the potential or the capacity to change. The stuck, on the other hand, often turn into what they are labeled in many organizations: "dead wood." They are much more likely to become passive gripers from the side lines, conservative resisters who are always complaining and interested in getting something more for themselves, but rarely constructive when it comes to making suggestions for improving the organization.

## CONCLUSION

The problem of opportunity, particularly as new groups press for their share of desirable jobs, is a difficult one in a low growth economy; it is especially difficult for the low growth organizations (such as universities) within the economy. Similarly, quality of life concerns, the uneasy companion to the push for advancement into better jobs, may come with costs that make them hard to implement—or at least they may pose too difficult a challenge to current principles on which organizations are based. Growing rights-consciousness also creates its own problems in internal dissension, interest-group fragmentation, and loss of common institutional purpose.

All of these trends have implications for higher education, not only in its role as *educator* but in its role as *employer*. It has been said that the job of a university president these days is to manage decline; to that we can easily add the job of mediating disputes. No crystal ball is needed to predict that under such circumstances, and in light of psychosocial trends in America, the personnel-related problems of higher education will grow—just as they have in private industry, but with less chance of automatic solutions.

It is also possible that unless universities as employers put their own houses in order, their ability to operate effectively as educators may be seriously impaired. The quality of life (both in and out of work) should not merely be *studied* as an academic matter by those in higher education in order that they might respond to students. It should be the object of active experimentation, of organizational innovations and improvements. Higher education should be responsive to those who derive their livelihood from the academy. Higher education supplies not only education; it also supplies jobs.

## FOOTNOTES

[1]Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Work in a New America," *Daedalus Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 107 (Winter 1978): pp. 47-78. All other data on labor force trends cited here can be found in this article.
[2]David Ewing, *Freedom Inside the Organization*. New York: Dutton 1977, pp. 16-17.
[3]Daniel Yankelovich, "Work and the New Breed." For the Work in America Institute Conference, Arden House, May 1978.
[4]*Ibid.*
[5]Daniel Bell, *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
[6]Kanter, "Work in a New America."
[7]Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
[8]Yankelovich, "Work and the New Breed."
[9]Kanter, "Work in a New America."
[10]Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Chapter 6. Evidence for the propositions about the impact of opportunity on behavior is detailed in that chapter.

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## LIVES IN TRANSITION: THE NEW MIDDLE GROUND*

**Ellen Goodman**

Usually, when I speak at universities, someone introduces me as "an emissary from the real world." This was fine until a year ago at Yale when a sophomore from the back of the room said, "What's so great about reality?"

I open this conference, then, whether or not from "the real world," as an emissary from a world in transition, a world in which public and private relationships are notably changing. I want to share with you what I think about how people are managing these changes and stimulate your own thinking about the positive roles that higher education can play.

Like most journalists, I am not a researcher and not a philosopher; I am a professional social observer. I have written most consistently about the single major change of our own adulthood, the change in sex roles. I think this is the change that began putting all of our lives in transition; from one acceptable life pattern for men and women to multiple patterns, from a static model of adulthood to a fluid model. Those of us who have come through this time can never again think of ourselves as "grown-ups" and of adult life as something that is finished and complete. We now look at life as a continuous process. Sensing this, and using these changes as a model, I think we can begin to understand other transitions in our lives as well.

### TRANSITIONS AND AMBIVALENCE

Let me go back and tell you a little about my own history, by way of illustrating the remarkable changes of the past ten years. I became a working mother six weeks after my daughter was born, after getting her off to a good start. When I first went back to work, I was literally the only working mother with a pre-school child in my office. The first several days back I was greeted by questions: "And who takes care of your child while you work?" I was defensive, the questions were offensive, and about the sixteenth time I was asked this I remember turning around and saying, "I just leave her at home with the refrigerator open and it all works out."

Well, today, 47% of the women in the U.S. are working mothers and a majority of families are two-parent working families. The only husband and wife who haven't changed are the charming couple in the "ring around the collar" ad. (My sister has a theory that the revolution will be here when that wife turns to her husband and says, "Why don't you wash your neck!")

I find today that people who were once full of criticism are now more inclined to ask questions. There is more sharing and less challenging than there was; lifestyles are no longer fighting words, or epithets that we throw at each other.

I think this last point is very often misunderstood. The late 70's are characterized in the media as a period of reaction and regression. "All quiet on the western campus," we're told. But I see something different going on. I don't think we are becoming reactionary. If there is a word that typifies the late 70's, it is "ambivalent." We are not turning to the right, as the pundits keep telling us, nor are we turning to the left. We are turning ambidextrous, if you will, answering social questions with both hands: on the one hand, this; on the other hand, that. We seem to have run out of simple answers. Occasionally our ambivalence is so paralyzing that it looks like apathy; but it is really conflict.

Ambivalence is the watchword in any time of major change, whether it be change in our private life or in society at large. We are not ambivalent about little changes, such as a change in clothing or in food. We are ambivalent about ones which threaten to disrupt our plans and assumptions, for these threaten us. A change of life pattern or in sex roles clearly is of the latter type, and, for many people, these changes have been disruptive.

In the late 60's and early 70's, this country experienced crisis in many ways; in the course of events, traditional roles for men and women came to be fundamentally altered. I have seen people respond to these alterations very much the way they respond to the passing of stages in

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*Edited from a transcript of her keynote address by Theodore J. Marchese, Barat College.

their own lives—to adolescence, for example. They respond with contradictory urges: one is to leap ahead, taking a short cut to the future; the other, to retreat to nostalgic visions of the past. These urges are often acted out for us in a public drama of polarity in which one political group represents "the great leap," while another represents "the retreat."

We saw these polarities some years back in the women's movement. On the one hand we had radical feminists who were radical innovators, the ones, if you remember, who spoke about doing away with the family and cybernizing child bearing. (I never quite figured out which was worse!) On the other hand we had the radical reactionaries. My favorite radical reactionary was a woman named Helen Andelin. Helen Andelin is to the right of the total woman. She wrote a book called *Fascinating Womanhood,* which, among other things, suggested that women should get off the highways. She would have us retreat to the 19th century. My favorite quote from her book is when she says, "When you disagree with your husband, stamp your feet upon the ground and beat upon his chest. Men love this."

These were the two groups that were set up in public dialogue. But these groups today represent the end zones—the two hands, if you will, between which the majority shuttle back and forth, ambivalently. The two present society with a conflict: between having to go back to the traditional family and traditional roles, or to go on to no family at all. But, for most people, these choices are neither possible nor palatable. And so, slowly, we have done what people do in any major period of change: we have tired to evolve, rather than to revolt.

## THE NEW MIDDLE GROUND

Traveling around the country, I now see pretty clearly the evolution of a new majority, a new middle ground, or whatever you want to call it: people living through this transition on the shaky terms of their own internal conflicts; conflicts between past and future, between values inherent in traditional roles and values inherent in change.

The emergence of the new middle ground fascinated me when I was covering the women's conference last November in Houston. The feminists were represented by Elly Smeal, who is a housewife (or, as the newspapers always say, "a self-confessed housewife"). The anti-change people, in turn, were represented by Phyllis Schafly, a public figure with political ambitions. Although these two women stood for diametrically opposite political positions, they were interesting symbols of the transitional need to try to adapt, to try to gather the best of change without losing the best of our roots. In this sense, the middle is never what we think it is—an averaging out of extremes. It isn't an averaging out of the total woman and the new woman, or of the male chauvinist and the liberated male; it is, rather, an evolving set of allegiances and opinions that shape our aspirations and adaptive strategies.

The state that I've called "the new middle ground" is itself a very interesting place. As an observer, I often speak with people about it. Like many people in transition, they so often identify themselves with a list of "buts": "I'm not a feminist but . . ." (You've all heard that one. The expression became so rampant that an editorial in the *New York Times* fantasized about the inaugural address of the first woman president: she began her speech by denouncing "uppity women." "I am not a feminist, but . . ." "I am not a chauvinist, but . . ." "I believe in equal rights but I'm not a women's libber," and so forth. And these are just the tip of the "buts" iceberg.

In listening carefully to the "buts," I hear something. I hear men and women trying to sort out what it is they want, and what it is they fear. When people's lives are in transition, they fear loss and seek growth. They want more and they fear loss. As Abe Maslow said, back in 1960, "I think it is best to think of the discontented woman as wanting to hold on to everything that she has but, like the labor organizers, simply wanting more."

The loss, the single fear that the new majority worrys about, centers on the family and personal relationships. As the role of adults changes, few men or women want to sacrifice the security of family life. Both, at the same time, seek the independence and excitement of change in the world.

The issues for men and women in this transition are sometimes different, yet in many ways the same. Neither wants to lose the special prerogatives of their traditional role. Both want

relief from the special problems of those roles, and both want the best of what is promised by change. In short—and this will come as no surprise—both want it all.

As for the differences, I find women wanting more opportunities in the world, and men wanting closer relationships, especially with their children. These are the goodies promised by change. I also find women more afraid of losing the special relationships that they had with their home and children, as they moved into the work world, while men fear losing power and success if they devote time and energy to their personal lives. Men and women then, want it all, but sense that they can't have it all.

**TRANSITIONAL LIFE STYLES**

Accompanying these changes are enormous personal pressures, pressures that come from living with change and from trying to carry the best of the past into a vastly different future. I also observe, with concern and some amusement, the emergence of transitional lifestyles. I grew up myself, for example, in an era of supermom. I don't know how many of you had or remember them, but it was supermom who sent you off to school at Halloween with pumpkin-shaped sandwiches with raisin eyes. She always had something loving in the offing, and did everything perfectly. Now, I find myself a grown-up in an era of the superwoman. I have difficulty describing superwoman except to describe a day in her life.

The superwoman of the 70's gets up in the morning and wakes her 2.6 children and they get up very, very wonderfully, no problems whatsoever, and get dressed. She goes downstairs and produces a gourmet Grade-A nutritional breakfast, which they actually eat, and then off they go to school. She goes upstairs and puts on her $300 Calvin Klein suit and goes out to her $25,000-a-year job, doing something creative and socially useful. She returns home from work to spend a truly good hour with the children, because it is not the quantity of time that matters but its quality. After that, she whips up a Julia Child 60-minute gourmet recipe, which the children eat. After dinner she goes upstairs and puts them to bed, comes downstairs and relates with her husband, and then they both go upstairs and she is multi-orgiastic until midnight. I guess she is familiar to you!

There is also a superman, whose task, although I haven't quite gotten it down to a day yet, is no less overwhelming. He is not only kind and warm and in constant attendance at PTA meetings, but also keeps in shape, listens to his biorhythms, and soon will be vice president of General Motors.

Both of these people are trying to make a success of new roles while not letting go of what they like of the old. They are trying to change without loss.

While this is happening to mom and dad, there is also increasing concern being focused on childhood, and early childhood especially. Mom and dad are now supposed to feel guilty because if they don't hang the right mobile over the crib at precisely the right moment their son won't get into Harvard. I decided some time ago the best thing that happened to my own relationship with my daughter was that she was four before I learned it was all over at three. This has made life much easier for both of us.

**STUDENTS: CONFLICT AND CHOICE**

All this ambivalence about the new middle ground, where the majority of Americans are now living, has great ramifications for the current generation of students.

I was reading Rollo May not long ago and a line of his caught my eye: "Without new possibilities there can be no conflict, there can only be despair." Judging from the time I've spent on campuses recently, I sense that one generation's despair has led to the next generation's conflict. The parents of the current generation of students, especially the mothers who are college-educated women, looked at the traditional role and asked, "Is this all there is?" Their despair led to change, to today's transitional roles; but now their leadership has produced conflicts within the present generation of students.

I spoke recently on a campus in Pennsylvania with a senior. She had just been home, and while there her mother had said to her, "Aren't you lucky to be living in this age when men and women

have so many choices that we didn't have when we were your age." (It was one of those speeches.) And the daughter said to me, "I don't feel that I have choices. I feel I have all that I see. I feel that all I see are the conflicts."

The fact is that college men and college women expect today to spend their lifetimes working. And parenthood, which was once a requirement and then an option, now looks like a Herculean feat. Students today look at their parents' desire "to do it all" with terror. I think this is connected with the hysteria you see on campuses about careers. Neither men nor women especially comprehend their choices or have a grip on anything that remotely has a long perspective. I've seen college students who want to get into medical or law school for essentially one reason: so that they will be "set" for life.

I met a young woman recently at my alma mater who was dying to get into graduate school. As I sat there talking with her, I had a sudden vision of her tutor, terrified that he was not going to be appointed assistant professor. Then I had a vision of the assistant professor over him, terrified that he wasn't going to get tenure. And way up there at the top of the heap was the tenured professor, who, in the midst of his mid-life crisis, had run off with a sophomore to Vermont.

It seems to me that the one thing that students haven't learned from changes in their parents' lives is how to cope with change. They will be living at a time and in a world where they will be called on to be far more flexible than we thought we had to be. Second careers will be the rule rather then the exception. They probably will have to embark on a variety of lifestyles in sequence in order to have even a portion of it all. Yet the students I meet face the future with fear. They entertain a profound hope that they can nail it all down by the day after commencement. What is called "apathy" or "conservatism" on campus may be paralysis born of conflicts and fears centered on the transition ahead.

**A ROLE FOR COLLEGES**

In all this I think that higher education can play a fundamental role. For one thing, if I were king—or, God forbid, a college president!—I would have three courses in my catalog: Flexibility 196(b), spring semester; Decisionmaking 36, a required course for seniors; and Change 1(a). I think it is as important to study life-changes as it is to have vocational guidance.

I also think that liberal-arts colleges in particular have to do something very difficult: and that is to resist the push toward careerism, a push that comes from parents and students who see the aim of education as a job the day after graduation. Realistically and practically, the only thing that students are going to carry with them through the demanding and changing lives they face are the things liberal arts education traditionally teaches: how to think about their lives and the world around them, and how to make decisions. It also teaches them the so-called frivolous things of life—art, music, literature, the pleasures that actually last the longest. These things, I think, are the "practical" ones for lives in transition.

I would, were I still king, call in many more people from the "real world" to break down the barriers and fear between universities and "out there," as students refer to it; even to show students that some of us have more or less survived some two or three mid-life crises and are still walking around. They don't believe it, you know.

I would teach one other course: Social Action 1. Right now I see, especially on college campuses, the mistaken notion that the problems I have talked about—for example, those of family and of roles—are strictly personal issues. Some of them are, but we all know that personal lives are very much affected by public policy. For example, one of the sad ironies of these times is that anti-change people have largely succeeded in grabbing the family as their issue. But it is, on the contrary, more change, conservative change, that will resolve some of the ambivalences and provide young people with more choice. Changes in this vein include flexible time, part-time work, a national day-care policy, a service industry that really serves our lives, and even convenience foods that won't produce cancer in white rats (although at this point I think we would all settle for a white rat that doesn't get cancer).

In any case, it is clear that more social change is needed. That is why I feel so strongly that on issues such as these, and such as ERA, a group such as AAHE has to take a stand. Not only because it is just, but because it is important for higher education to assume that kind of leadership.

Let me conclude, as your emissary from the real world, by repeating that the 70's are not as reactionary a time as you are being told. These are times of solidifying forces of change, when the mainstream is moving. It is a time when we finally have to accept change as the concept and learn something about its management. I foresee universities increasingly operating as recycling centers, as change resorts, to which people will turn as they go through the major turning points of their lives—whether it be from childhood to adulthood, from being an at-home mother to a working mother, from one career to the next, or from a last career to retirement. The management of change—life change, social change, institutional change—has to be a crucial issue for higher education. You can play a major role in supporting and helping all of us realize that it is through change that our lives and our society attain fullest realization.

Hubert Humphrey once ended a speech by saying, "Muriel says I don't have to be interminable in order to be immortal." So let me leave you with but one more thought. The most important thing I've learned about change is the most basic: that the process of changing our lives is a slow one. Jack Kerouac once summed up this pace perfectly in a line that I commend to the walls of your office: "Walking on water wasn't built in a day."

Thank you.

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